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WHAT THE FARM WOMAN CAN DO TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF HER FAMILY*

By Dorothy Dickins

I. Use Time Efficiently

Studies by the Home Economics Department show that the farm homemaker spends about 10 hours a day in work activities including homemaking activities, care of children, food production and processing, work in yard and premises, and gainful work or assistance in gainful work. It is important that she devote her time to those activities which will count for most. Is there any method whereby she can make a rough check? Any method whereby she can tell if home production pays?

The following method is suggested: Divide the amount of money available for family living during the year by the number of working hours during the same period and this will give the homemaker's wage rate per hour. For example if the hours are 3640 (or 70 per week) and the amount available to spend for family living is \$1200, then her services might be rated at 33 cents an hour. Based on an 8 hour work day this would be \$2.65 a day, \$18.50 a week or \$960 a year. If only \$600 is available for family living then her services might be rated at 17 cents an hour.

The homemaker would not engage in those tasks which would not net the hourly wage rate if the goods or services could be purchased on the market in the quantity and of the quality desired, except in those cases where the tasks themselves were pleasurable.

Applying the method: Let's say the homemaker wanted to decide whether to make or buy a rayon dress. She would price ready-made dresses such as she wanted to buy and yard goods, trimming and thread of the same description. If the ready-made dress she wanted cost \$12.00 and she could get similar material and trimming for \$6.00 and it takes 6 hours to make the dress, then the wage rate is \$1.00 an hour.

*This discussion is taken in large part from Bulletin 346 of the Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station of the same title, but material from many other studies by the same author are drawn on.

The same method could be applied to food production. As we know, it costs a great deal of money to buy all the foods needed for an adequate diet.

Using the Master Low Cost Food Plan of the Home Economics Services of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, a year's food supply for a family of a husband, a wife, a 13 year old boy and 10 year old girl was worked out and foods priced at a chain store in Starkville, Mississippi, May 27, 1955. This year's food supply costs \$660. Remember that foods included in this supply were not expensive foods. No steak was included (unless hamburger is so considered). There were no food luxuries in this supply. Guests were not allowed for.

This thing we know: It is the homemaker in only the very high income family that will not find it economically profitable to produce a part of the food supply for home consumption. More information is needed by families on labor costs of producing foods for home use as a basis for deciding on food production programs.

These averages compiled by Dr. D. W. Parvin of the Department of Agricultural Economics should be helpful. It took 200 hours a year to keep one dairy cow, 300 hours per 100 hens, 15 hours per hog, 250 hours per acre of garden or truck crops, 120 hours per acre of sweet potatoes and 30 hours per acre of corn. These estimates are taken from small scale operations.

Time management: The farm homemaker can improve the economic status of her family by good management of her time. As she plans her work it would be well for her to ask questions such as: Is this task really necessary? Do I have my tasks in the best order through the day to save myself strength and time? Is my equipment and material arranged to save time? Is there a shorter way of doing this job? When I do some job over and over do I: Sit comfortably? Let gravity help by letting things drop into the pan? Have both hands at work? Make the job safer? Use a better tool? Arrange work within elbow reach? Use the help of the family? Do I make good use of my body by standing correctly, lifting correctly - using comfortable work clothes. Do I train my family to do the things they can help with?

II. Use of Money Where it Counts Most

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Misuse of money income for family living results from two causes:

- (1) Lack of family planning for its use.
- (2) Ignorance on the part of the wife of the qualities in goods that make them suit their purposes.

Planning for use of money income is the joint responsibility of the husband and wife, and depends on their long-time farm plans and other goals. Without long-time plans and goals the wife, as well as the husband, is very likely to use the cash they have to satisfy wants of the moment. In studies by the Home Economics Department good use of money income by the family has rarely been found when the wife has no part in making the farm plans or in families where she failed to take an interest in the many farm problems. Good use of money rests first on planning for its use and it is the part of the wife as a partner in the farm business to assist with the plans and help carry them out.

There is no one "right" plan. Each family needs a plan that's tailor made to fit its particular wants and needs. No family can be an average family.

Selection of goods and services on the market: Farm homemakers can improve the economic status of their families by using skill and discrimination in selection of goods and services on the market. Much income can be wasted by poor selection. Here are examples noted in family living studies by the Department: Cheaply constructed furniture of the "gingerbread" type - furniture which in only a few years will be in the trash heap. Large amounts of medicine claimed to cure - which though not harmful in or of itself is harmful in its final results, as it prevents treatment when most needed. Paying excessive amounts for installment without knowing what it cost or exploring other methods of financing.

In a study made in 1943 of a selected group of good and poor household managers participating in the Farmers Home Administration program it was found that one of the big differences in women in these groups was in the selection of goods

on market. Factual data about such goods and services are supplied by trade associations, buying guides, testing bureaus, government bureaus and research organizations.

Homemakers in high income families: In the method suggested for testing whether home production pays, wage rates of homemakers with large sums available for family living will make production of food seem unprofitable. However, there are certain production activities these homemakers enjoy, and other production activities they will want to carry on because they and their families prefer the home product.

Women in high income families may own most kinds of labor saving household equipment and feel their homemaking goals accomplished. Ownership of household equipment, however, does not necessarily mean good use of it. Maybe poor use is being made of the freezer locker, the vacuum cleaner.

III. Improving Family Health by Following Recommendations of Nutrition and Health Specialists

That there are two means whereby the homemaker may improve the health and in turn the economic status of her family has been shown in dietary studies, food preparation and family living studies by this Department. These are (1) by provision of nutritionally adequate and well prepared meals and (2) good sanitation facilities such as proper sewage disposal, screening and a pure water supply.

IV. Acting in the Capacity of Partner in the Farm Business

Efficient use of money income, and of time and effort by the women of the household contributes to improved farm family living as does keen interest in the farm business. A comparison of net incomes from farming of families of full time farmers with wife a farm homemaker and with wife employed in industry made by members of the Home Economics Department shows 43% higher farm income for the family with wife a farm homemaker. Some of these farm homemakers sold food products such as poultry, eggs, milk, butter, tomatoes. A number helped make the crop. It might be noted that these two groups of families were as comparable as

possible. All resided in poor agricultural areas of the state. The study was limited to families in which the wife was 17 to 35 years of age.

It is recognized of course that husbands of farm homemakers may have had more farm managerial ability than those of industrial workers. But some of the difference in farm income of the two groups was due to labor of wife.

In families with only one woman many hours of field work would seem an unwise use of time. The farm woman has a distinct economic contribution to make in feeding, clothing, sheltering, nursing and training members of her family. She cannot do this when she remains in the field for long periods. Here are some of the losses which have been observed when the wife spends long hours in the field: (1) hurriedly planned and poorly cooked meals; (2) clothing needing repair; (3) ready-made poorly constructed garments of shoddy material; (4) "running" noses; (5) disorderly children; (6) limited poultry supply; (7) garden choked with weeds.

In studies made by the home economics department some farm homemakers have been interviewed who frankly state that they prefer field work to house work. This is a problem that the home economist must face. Many women know more about field work than house work since they have worked in the field since childhood.

The farm homemaker not only contributes to net farm income, but she contributes to the food supply for the family. In the study previously referred to of farm and industrial homemakers married to full time farmers, money value of food produced and used by the family was 36% greater in homes of the farm homemaker than of the industrially employed homemaker.

In a recent study of the home-produced food supply including 143 families in Quitman and Tate Counties, it was the wife who most often carried on such production and processing activities and spent most time in doing them.

When families were classified into two groups, low (L) and high (H), according to money value of home raised food used, husbands and wives in (h) group were found to have spent twice as much time during the week preceding the interview doing production tasks as had husbands and wives in group (L). Money value of

home raised food used was three times as great in (H) group.

In this same Quitman and Tate County study it was found that relatively more husbands in the (H) group had put in time during the previous year on activities involving food production and processing for family use than in the (L) group.

To summarize, in an ideal farm partnership of husband and wife, the wife takes a minor role in actual production of money crops. She understands farm goals and assists in actual work in emergencies. She is the leader in food production and processing, but her husband helps out in emergencies and in tasks better suited for men than women.

V. Engaging in Non-Agricultural Pursuits

In view of the fact that many farmers in Mississippi are classified as low-income farmers and that net profits from farming are low, there is need for canvassing sources of income other than agriculture for rural women. There are two possibilities: (1) Sale of handicrafts; and (2) Gainful work away from home. In studies made by the home economics department, few rural women have been found to earn from the first source, but many from the second source. The first type of activity has been shown especially suitable for the women with children, women nearing middle age or over, and women on out-of-the-way farms; the second type of activity for young women, whether single, widowed, divorced, or married.

In a recent study including 517 families in rural areas of four industrialized counties in Mississippi, wives or female heads in 20 per cent of the families had had gainful work away from home during the year preceding the interview. These women had earned an average of about \$1,000. Earnings differed greatly from one woman to another as some engaged in domestic service, others in factory work, teaching, etc.

Whether or not the farm homemaker should continue work after her children come, is, of course, a problem for her and her husband to decide. In some families the cash income from farming is low and the demands for cash income so great that

every possibility for adding to it will have to be utilized. Before the decision to work away from home is finally reached the gains and losses from working outside the home need to be listed and most carefully considered.

Some gains from non-agricultural work mentioned by women included in studies are - cash earnings sorely needed by the family, pleasant association with other workers, enjoyment of non-agricultural work.

In deciding whether or not to take a job away from home women need to consider extra expenses incurred working away from home such as transportation, extra clothing beauty parlor, lunches, soft drinks. When working away from home their contribution to the non-money income of the family is reduced. They can no longer enter active partnership in the farm business with their husbands. The money income from farming is thus reduced. The possible effects of the absence of the mother upon child development are difficult to determine. The effects of absence of the mother may be more detrimental during late childhood and early adolescence than in infancy and especially so in the case of the daughter. Studies at the Nebraska Station show better personal adjustment of the farmer's daughter when her mother does not work outside the home.

VI. Guiding Sons and Daughters

The farm woman can improve the economic status of the future family as well as that of her own. The kind of training which her children receive at home determines largely what their economic status will be when they leave the parental home. That habits of work and thrift formed under the mother's direction last when children get out on their own, is generally known. That few children get an education without some encouragement at home is also a well known fact.

The relation of schooling to occupation was clearly shown in a study of the adult children of 160 representative Mississippi farmers. Sons and daughters with little schooling were engaged in wage work, or as farm tenants, or married to the same. From this occupational study it appeared that good schooling for the daughter is even more important than for the son, since the schooling which the mother

has is more closely related to the schooling that her children receive than is the schooling of the father.

In guiding future producers the farm homemaker can develop habits of industry and thrift in her children; a liking for work. One likes to do what one can do well. A recent study of attitudes of rural school children towards food production and processing activities shows that children are more favorable to such activities when they perform them often. This shows the importance of youth being given opportunities for performing tasks to which they are unaccustomed, those involving the learning of new skills as well as those ordinarily considered suitable for children of their particular age and sex.

The farm homemaker can contribute to economic status of her family by:

- (1) Using time efficiently.
- (2) Using money where it counts for the most.
- (3) Improving family health by following recommendations of nutrition and health specialists.
- (4) Acting in the capacity of partner in the farm business.
- (5) Engaging in non-agricultural pursuits.
- (6) Guiding sons and daughters in such a way that they will make a valuable economic contribution in the future.

GOOD HOME MANAGEMENT PAYS

By Dorothy Dickins

In 1943 family income and expenditure records were obtained from about 1000 farm families in the Farmers Home Administration program in Mississippi, Arkansas and Louisiana. Each county home management supervisor in Region VI was asked to furnish a record from a family with the wife a good home manager and with the wife a poor home manager.

A good home manager was defined as (1) able to set goals and accomplish ends set; (2) has fund of information and uses it in solving problems; (3) conserves resources, recognizes signs of quality, uses money to advantage; (4) possesses skill in household tasks; (5) shares responsibility with other members of family.

A poor home manager was, on the other hand (1) unable to formulate goals; (2) does not have a fund of knowledge or is not able to use what she has; (3) is wasteful of resources, does not recognize signs of quality, spends money unwisely; (4) lacks skill in household tasks; (5) is too ready to do what others in family should and might do.

In connection with this study, husbands were also classified as to managerial ability either as "above average", or "average and below". Dr. L. S. Allbaugh, agricultural economist at Iowa State College, suggested criteria. The two he thought most important (based on 15 years of farm management records with a group of 1000 Iowa farmers) were (1) ability in making decisions and getting things done; (2) family cooperation. County farm management supervisors rated the husbands in each family for whom records were submitted.

The difference in net income of families with good and poor home managers - management ability of husband held constant was:

Difference in net income of
(a) and (b).

(a)	(b)	<u>White families</u>	<u>Negro families</u>
(1) Wife good home manager, husband above average farm manager.	Wife poor home manager, husband above average farm manager.	(a) 16% greater	(a) 27% greater
(2) Wife good home manager, husband average or below average farm manager.	Wife poor home manager, husband average or below average farm manager.	(a) 16% greater	(a) 21% greater

There were also differences in favor of the good home manager in value of home living and in change in net worth of the family.





